

Intelligence Officer Sentenced in Britain

By Maureen Johnson
Associated Press

LONDON, April 16—Michael John Bettaney, a middle-ranking officer in Britain's counterintelligence agency, was sentenced today to 23 years in prison for passing secrets to the Soviet Union.

But Bettaney, 34, who wanted to become a KGB "mole" within MI5, was a spy Moscow left out in the cold, by one account, because he apparently looked too good to be true to his potential Soviet spy masters.

According to the Press Association, Britain's domestic news agency, the Soviet secret service itself tipped off British intelligence about Bettaney.

"They . . . thought it was a clumsy British plan to plant a double agent on them," the agency said, quoting British security sources.

[Other security sources suggested to British reporters that MI5 knew of his betrayal for some time before his arrest, United Press International reported.]

Bettaney, 34, the Oxford-educated only child of a factory janitor, was convicted today on 10 charges under Britain's Official Secrets Act.

The prosecution said he left samples of top-secret information in three letters in midnight visits to the London home of a Soviet diplomat, First Secretary Arkadi V. Gouk, whom Bettaney believed to be a KGB agent.

In a statement from jail, Bettaney lambasted Britain's Conservative government and declared that the British and U.S. intelligence services sought by subversion to destroy "the entire fabric of society" in the Soviet Union and other Communist nations.

At the close of the jury trial at the Old Bailey Central Criminal Court, Chief Justice Lord Lane described Bettaney as "self-opinionated and dangerous . . . and in many ways puerile."

Except for the opening and closing, the five-day trial was held behind closed doors because of the sensitivity of the material Bettaney hoarded at the modest suburban house where he lived alone.

Security officers said his home in

Coulsden, west of London, was filled with mementos of his dead parents, along with some of Britain's secrets hidden in cushions and kitchen cupboards.

Bettaney, who said he would appeal, was convicted of spying for the Soviet Union for 10 months starting in December 1982 when he joined the British security agency that is supposed to catch spies.

Bettaney said nothing in court when the sentence was passed. But in a statement read by defense lawyer Michael Mansfield, Bettaney said he attempted to become a spy because the British government was intensifying "the inequalities and injustices in British society."

"I thought and I think that the close relationship between the Conservative government and the American administration . . . presents a danger to peace," Bettaney added.

He was arrested Sept. 16, Attorney General Michael Havers said, the night before he planned to leave for Vienna, Austria, to try to prove himself to KGB agents.

In spying for ideological reasons, Bettaney was similar to Britain's most damaging spy of late—Geoffrey Prime. He was a translator of Russian at the top-secret Government Communications Headquarters at Cheltenham.

Prime was sentenced in 1982 to 35 years in jail after being convicted of spying for the Soviets for 14 years.

Prime and Bettaney differ in background from the immediate postwar generation of Cambridge-educated, upper-class spies for whom a flirtation with Marxism at the university in the 1930s turned to a lifetime of betrayal.

Guy Burgess, Donald MacLean and Kim Philby, who fled to the Soviet Union in the 1950s and 1960s as the net closed on them, and one-time royal art adviser Anthony Blunt, all were products of Britain's expensive private schools.

Bettaney, educated at a state high school, joined government service in 1975, one of a trickle of working-class entrants hired during years of debate about the "old school tie" domination of the senior ranks of the civil service.

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